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## Teaching English as a Foreign Language for Different Proficiency Level Learners: a Company Staff

**Thaer Mohammed Ali,**

MA, teacher, Al-Anbar Educational Directorate Anbar-Iraq

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### **Abstract:-**

*Educators, employees, and job developers alike have shown lack of English proficiency as a basic obstacle to professional career improvement in Iraq. Since 2003, hundreds of different organizations and companies have entered Iraq to participate and do business in the re-building projects. To perfume better, companies are hiring only individuals who can communicate in foreign language. As it is agreed that staff with English language skills have strong advantage over other employees, but to expect all employees speak English is totally illusion. A brilliant idea came to the light which is, training the staff of a company by well professional English trainer. It has been a privilege for me to be an English trainer in two companies.*

*This paper is intended to provide a particular guide for trainers of English facing different proficiency level learners. It sheds light to the factors which bring to the development of a multilevel classroom and tend to explain the advantages and challenges of these types of classes.*

**Key words: - EOP, practitioner, multilevel,**

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### **Introduction:**

The purpose of learning English became the core, is a simple answer to the question why learners need to learn a foreign language. English for specific purposes ESP is likely to be designed for adult learners. As Hutchison and Waters (1987) define ESP as an *approach* rather than a *product* which means ESP doesn't involve a particular kind of language. ESP is divided into two main areas according to when they take place; a) *English for Academic purposes EAP* and b) *English for Occupational Purposes EOP*. EOP is our main concern in this paper.

Some authors like Duddly-Evans and St John, 1998 use the term "practitioner" rather than "teacher" to assure that ESP work involves much more than teaching.

This paper is trying to answer three key questions said by a practitioner:-

#### **1-What am I doing here?**

The first thing that comes to your mind is "toughest job you'll ever love seems almost impossible". Your trainees are numerous; many may be older than you. Your trainees have made it clear that they want just pass the final test or just killing time, they don't care for learning the language as much they do care avoiding failure. Some of them cannot see any other reason why they should learn the language as they work as administrators and need no English at their work and sometimes you have to agree with them.

But in return, you will find a lot of trainees are willing to make the impossible possible, which gives you a glimpse of hope that you are not wasting your or their time. "I have sent my wife and my kids to their grandma house, to clear my mind and study hard for the final test" I still do remember this phrase said by one of my trainees.

Teaching English language classes to students in schools presents challenges all over the world but teaching multilevel employees or a private company staff presents the real and hard ones. This paper will discuss the ways in which an instructor can create a productive learning environment in a multilevel classroom sitting. As Karshen, Stephen.D & Terrell, Tracy (2002) point out, we talk about the fluent student sitting next to the one who can barely piece together a sentence.

According to Taylor Marcia (2005) some factors teachers have to consider in these types of classes are:

***Student's previous experience with education-*** variance in educational background means that some students have more experience in English classes so the teacher is likely to find that such students are

ready and eager to move on to new material while other students are still struggling.

***Learners' expectations of appropriate classroom activities-*** in this case the teacher have to make clear beforehand the classroom activities they are going to deal with.

***Individual student's personality-*** the teacher should not forget the importance of individual factors such as intelligence and motivation.

## 2- Who are my Students?

"WHEN A MAN DOES NOT KNOW WHAT HARBOR HE IS MAKING FOR, NO WIND IS THE RIGHT WIND."

From the first lecture, the more you know about your trainees, the more relevant your class will be. As a language teacher, you are eager to know about the English skills of your trainees, and normally the overall level of trainees' language skills may be lower than expected. Because most of them had left school years ago, or never did well in English class or many other reasons. Speaking slowly, selecting your vocabulary, and avoiding slang are good techniques to be understood. You may need to repeat what you have said in different ways or demonstrate what you mean on the other.

It is important to show them how good English speaker you are in one hand, and to make them feeling relax while listening to your simple and clear words or sentences.

## 3- How am I teaching?

Good management skills are required while teaching multilevel classes. The trainers should first build up a sense of group feeling within the whole class before dividing the trainees to groups. It is important for a trainer to encourage the trainees' responsibility in their process of learning. Trainees should realize that the new behaviors will be demanded for them such as asking them to go out of their chairs and work different situations. They will be asked to work with the whole class exchanging some information or solving some tasks. Trainees will progress quickly if the trainer relinquish the teacher centered class and adopt the role of facilitator in the student centered class.

Starting class with a whole-group warm-up is a great way to fasten a sense of teamwork in a multi-level class. There are a variety of warm-up activities to get students focused on English at the beginning of a class that can be incorporated into a routine. Some warm up activities include: songs, games (hangman, telephone, bingo, etc.), quizzes, and discussion questions. Reviewing material is also a common warm up activity.

To activate and motivate trainees you can use the strategy of mixing activities like lectures, small group work and pair work. Actually, there are several effective strategies for trainees' motivation and activation as Hess (2001) points out " it is not necessary to hear everything said or read everything written, students should talk about real issues of importance to them, and there should be activities with many choices of expression".

### **Teacher-Trainee Relationship**

Keeping a distance away from your trainees to gain respect is not a solution. On the contrary, building a friendship rapport on a respect which acknowledges the teacher's authority is ideal.

While introducing yourself and your course objectives, you have to assure your trainees that you will work hard and do your best to achieve the course goals. In the same token, you expect that your trainees will be prepared for each lesson, and behave well.

Learning your trainees's names is very genus way to prove that you are interested in them. Learning all their names may be difficult, but you have to make the effort and be diligent. Your trainees will appreciate your interest in their lives and in return they also want to know more about you, actually everything about you even your salary. Being respected is more important than being popular, so be careful and remember that you are an authority figure and we recommend a friendly but respectful style.

As they are mature and a company staff and most of them are fathers but this doesn't mean that you will have angel trainees. How to punish the misbehaviors, we can offer some advises such as first try some attention moves. Use direct eye contact from your spot are move close the trainee chair. Sometimes you need to pause in the middle of your sentences and gaze at him-her.

As you think about discipline and all the factors that contribute to good management, remember to control your own patterns of behavior. Your reactions must be calm and predictable, with a balance of positive responses to good behavior and firm responses when the students break the rules. The key to good management is establishing respect and getting control. We cannot overemphasize this crucial point: well-managed classrooms require the firm guidance of a respected teacher.

Answering questions and how to handle the questions that you don't know the answer is apart of being prepared. As you are trying to contextualize and create a daily event with your material, trainees will begin to ask about their true concerns and you can't easily answer them. If you are comfortable with your limitations, trainees will appreciate and respect that. In return, think about alternatives, such as allow students to answer instead of you or search about it next day. Trainees need to know how to get the information and share it with others.

### **Some basic suggestions for teaching different proficiency level learners:-**

- 1- Be friendly and welcoming. Never let smile leave your face while dealing with adult learners.
- 2- It is not necessary to speak in a louder voice, just speak clearly and simply. Do not talk out of context instead use related ideas.
- 3- Trainees like to help each other, so a partner or a pair work is a must.
- 4- Body language is very communicative, so using gestures or facial expressions are an effective way to communicate.
- 5- Involve the whole class by giving a task that trainees cannot complete it successfully unless talking with others.
- 6- Focus attention on competitions' tasks. In spite of being adult learners but they do like defeating each other. A priceless gift means a lot for them.
- 7- Arrange a native English speaker visit whenever possible. Trainees feel great talking to native English speaker in front of you.
- 8- Try to make use of " Tell me I forget, show me I remember, involve me I understand". Always use visual aids.
- 9- You will find some students say "yes" for anything you utter, try to be understandable.

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10- Songs and games are very effective ways of teaching vocabulary, always include them in your class to have fun also.

## Conclusion

When planning for teaching different proficiency level learners, teachers must put in consideration the varied level of their students. In general, most students will perform in the "at level" but still some will perform "below" level or "above" level.

Below level students are struggling to keep up with instructions. They need extra time and more explanation to do the task and often dependent on their partner. These students may have the feeling of unqualified and low self-esteem and are usually recognize that everyone in class is learning more rapidly than they are. They are at risk as they become frustrated and blame themselves for their inability to learn like others.

No worry for the at-level students as they will perform well and following the instructions in normal way. Concerning the above-level students who have more proficiency than others are at risk also as they may become frustrated with the teacher for not providing them more challenging tasks.

They can also get bored waiting other students to catch up the instructions. Let us not forget that the ability of students can also vary on the four language skills reading, writing, speaking and listening. The same student can be above-level in speaking activity but at-level in writing activity. A teacher must be aware of each student's strengths and weaknesses during assigning tasks.

It is a challenging for teachers to group students for different proficiency level, however according to CALPRO article on managing the multilevel classroom "the use of grouping strategies has been found to be an effective management tool in multilevel setting to provide efficient use of teacher and student time". In fact, there are four ways to group the students:-

- Pair work ( two students work together)
- Group work ( three to six students working together)
- Teamwork (teams of students working in a competition)
- Whole class work( the whole class participating in an activity)

The role of the teacher is not only giving instructions but also to be sure of matching pairs, groups or teams.

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